

Hart Van Denburg, *City Pages*

DFL Rep. Betty McCollum wants to know why, if Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the federal government are all broke, GOP Rep. Michele Bachmann wants to build a \$700 million bridge over the St. Croix River.

Bachmann, who complains that "porking" has gotten out of control, is pushing an "excessive and irresponsible project, both unwise and improbable," McCollum says.

Bachmann announced her plan yesterday. It's similar to a proposal by the St. Croix County, Wisconsin, Board of Supervisors to exempt the St. Croix River Crossing Project near Stillwater from the the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

The four-lane bridge that was originally planned by the the Minnesota Department of Transportation was shelved last year after the National Park Service reversed itself and ruled the proposed structure did not comply with the law.

The goal of the new structure is to replace the aging Stillwater Lift Bridge by sending Highway 36 traffic over the new bridge south of Stillwater. The highway comes out of McCollum's fourth congressional district and crosses into Bachmann's sixth district.

McCollum and conservationists support finding a more modest replacement. She's fired off a letter to the St. Croix County supervisors, saying in part, "I will do everything in my power as a Member of Congress to defeat any federal legislation that lifts the protections from the Lower St. Croix National Scenic Riverway for a project of this magnitude."

"It is difficult to express how strongly I oppose the position taken by the St. Croix County Board," McCollum said in a statement. "The proposed bridge across the St. Croix River - with an estimated cost of at least \$700 million - is fiscally irresponsible, environmentally damaging, and will create a transportation mess for communities along Minnesota Highway 36 in the Congressional District I represent."

She repeated those sentiments and aimed them at Bachmann yesterday.

She's also appalled that Bachmann's bill tries to do an end-run around federal law by simply declaring that the rules don't apply to her pet project.

Bachmann denies she's exempting the bridge from federal law. But she's cherry picking the National Park Service ruling that suits her needs: "My bill points to the 2005 National Park Service decision" that supported the bridge.

The most recent ruling, in March 2010, is based on changes to the proposed project that was presented in 2005. Here's what it says, in part:

As a result of the review of the Act and available guidance, and in consultation with the Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council, the NPS concluded that if it determined that the project has direct and adverse effects on the values for which the river was designated as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, and those impacts could not be avoided or eliminated, then the NPS cannot consent to the project.